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BURNING BUSH

BY

KARLE WILSON BAKER



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Burning Bush.

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by

Karle Wilson Baker.



New Haven:

Yale University Press.

London : Humphrey Milford : Oxford University Press.

Mdccccxii.



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To
Thomas Ellis Baker

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I AM indebted to the following magazines for permission to reprint poems which first appeared in their pages: *The Yale Review*, the *Nation*, the *Literary Review*, *Harper's*, the *Delineator*, the *Farm Journal*, *Sunset*, the *Survey*, *Holland's*, the *Texas Review*, the *Bookman*, *Contemporary Verse*, the *Measure*, the *Midland*, and *Poetry* (Chicago).

Contents.

	PAGE
Fairy Fires	13
November	14
1. Leaves	14
2. Overhead Travellers	14
3. Grey Days	14
4. Acorns	15
Stars	16
Winter Flowers	17
Burning Bush	18
Way-song	19
Morning Song	20
Bees	21
Road-wise	22
Song	23
Storm Song	24
Song to the Beat of Wings	25
I Love the Friendly Faces of Old Sorrows	26
Prisons	27
I Weight My Mind	28
Pines in the Rain	29
The Lord of the Trees	30
The Four Kings	31
The World at the Bottom of the Lake	32
Grey	33
Tree Talk	34
I Shall Be Loved as Quiet Things	35
Alternatives	36
The Highwayman	37
The Marching Mountains	38
The Window	39

	PAGE
To One Who Smiles at My Simplicity . . .	40
Answers	41
Dogmatic	42
New York from the Harbor	43
The Old Woman with the Grey Shawl . . .	44
Street-ends	45
Sunset Song	46
Box-car Letters	47
The Hill Steps	49
The Elopement	50
Temperate Tribute	51
Maples in the Fall	52
The Greedy Ghost	53
Rain and Wind	54
Color	55
Mountain-dream	56
A Flock of Birds	57
1. A Bluebird	57
2. Doves	57
3. The Wren	57
4. The Wood-thrush, or Bell-bird . . .	58
5. The Jay	58
6. The Cardinal and His Lady . . .	59
Cocoons	60
Garrets for Poets	62
Dressmaker	63
Tools	64
No Respector of Persons	65
Full Moon before Dark	66
The Lord Speaks from the Banks of the Stream .	67
Three Small Poems	69
1. To Get Wisdom	69

	PAGE
2. Meekness and Pride	69
3. Courage	69
Not in the Whirlwind	70
Vanity	71
Songs from a Still Place	72
1. The Wall of Tears	72
2. The Plaited Wreath	72
3. Beads	72
4. Peace	73
5. Giving	73
6. Free	74
Orders	75
One Morning in Gyara	76
The Cripple	78
Pronouns	79
Root and Flower	80
Initiation	81
Winter Dusk	82
Acknowledgment	83
Anniversary in November	84
1. Birthday	84
2. The Light in the Woods	84
3. Migrants	85
4. All Saints' Day	85
Clear Hour	86
The Housewife: Winter Afternoon	87
Sky-colors	88
1. Blue and Silver	88
2. Rose and Grey	88
3. Pale Pink and Primrose	88
4. Clear Gold	89
Soft Rain	90

	PAGE
The Mirrored Bird	91
If My Breath Is Taken	92
Labels	93

Fairy Fires.

THEY burn on the window-pane
When the day is soft and late,
But you think they are out in the cold
Between the bush and the gate.

Clean through the blaze you look
At the dear, black, naked trees:
No beautiful bough is burned
By hungerless fires like these,

But no heart is ever warmed,
And no spirit weds desire,
And no house is ever home
That wants for the fairy fire.

November.

LEAVES

MY great trees are stripping themselves,
Throwing away their gauds,
Preparing for the winter of their souls.
But my little cedars
Are picking up the twisted golden baubles
And sticking them in their hair.

OVERHEAD TRAVELLERS

THERE you go in your breathless wedge,
Melting across the sky over my house like a clamor-
ing shadow!
My heart leaps, and I flap my wings wildly,
But I cannot go just yet.
My fledglings do not grow so fast as yours,
I must scratch for them longer.
But some day, we, too, shall take the air-lines—
My mate and I.
(Unless, indeed, I shall have found real wings in the
meantime.
In that case, it won't matter,
For I shall go farther than you, then, haughty birds.)

GREY DAYS

ON a grey day
When I am alone,
My heart glows and blooms
Like embers among ashes.

On a grey day
When I am alone,
The tent-fires of nomads,
And the road-fires of palmers,
And the hearth-fires of builders
Burn in my spirit.

ACORNS

NOW and then, all through the day and night,
An acorn drops on the roof and goes rattling down
the gutter.

I cannot tell why the sound delights me,
Or why I have such a pleased and noticed feeling,
As of a child that shares a joke with its parent,
When I think of the black old oak
Stretching his craggy arms over my roof-tree
And dropping his polished pebbles on my house.

Stars.

I AM so small: when I go out
Beneath the heaven of All Souls,
And see them twinkling all about
Who won through to their briary goals;
When I look up into the dome
Their gathered constellations wreath—
The Great, the Faithful, trooping home—
I am so small, I scarcely breathe.

I am so great—for I am I.
Not one in all that starry band
Went just the way I travel by
To overtake my fatherland.
Forever seeking mine own Sign,
Lord of my spirit's lone estate,
My soul's a heaven where They shine
A part of me—I am so great.

Winter Flowers.

AT the door of my kitchen I feed my flowers:
My pigeons, the silvery lilies that sweep
Over the garden the frost has slain,
Wild as beauty, and soft as sleep.

My flowers bloom up over chimney and stack,
Blue smoke-irises, bodiless things,
Orchids of pearl that I could not reach
Except that my hunger and thirst have wings.

And then, when my flowers of light have gone,
Vanished and gone as a shadow goes,
I kneel by the hearth in a little house,
And warm my heart at a burning rose.

Burning Bush.

MY heart, complaining like a bird,
Kept drooping on her weary nest:
"Oh, take me out under the sky,
Find me a little rest!"

I took her out under the sky,
I climbed a straggling, sandy street,
Where little weathered houses sag,
And town and country meet,

And in the corner of a yard
Unkempt, forlorn, and winter-browned,
A single sprig of Burning Bush
Thrust up from the bare ground.

It bore no leaf as yet—one flower,
Three pointed buds of pure rose-flame:
Up whirred my heart, circled in air,
Back to my bosom came.

And that was all I showed to her—
I could not find another thing—
But, "Take me home again," she cried,
"And I will sing and sing!"

Way-song.

GIVE me your clearest hour
And let me go:
Days are too garrulous,
Years are too slow.

Set me a Brownie's feast,
Cake-crumbs and wine,
Outside the tavern-door—
Thus I'd dine.

The stars are so far apart,
My steps so small,
I must make haste who would
Set foot in all.

Morning Song.

THERE'S a mellow light just over the hill,
And somewhere a yellower daffodil,
And honey, somewhere, that's sweeter still.

And some were meant to stay like a stone,
Knowing the things they have always known,
Sinking down deeper into their own;

But some must follow the wind and me,
Who like to be starting and like to be free,
Never so glad as we're going to be!

Bees.

FROM some far home I brought a swarm of bees,
Old honey-makers hiving in my brain :
They find the small, green flowers of the trees,
And the one poppy idling in the grain ;

The sun is shepherd to my heedless flocks ;
In vain I bid them forage or be still :
Their drunken wings sing down the solemn clocks
Fanning the flowers upon some timeless hill.

No stretch of stony path, nor bitter seas,
But must yield up some blossom, white or red,
Some nectar-throated anguish, for my bees—
I shall have honey, though I starve for bread.

Road-wise.

THEY told me to save my pennies,
But I scorned to be prudent and wise,
And I poured them out by the lapful
To please the old Gypsy's eyes;

Yes, even my mother's luck-piece
I laid in her wheedling palm,
To pay for my iron breast-pin
And my vial of Wayfarer's Balm.

So you need not flutter your ribbons
And trinkets before my eyes;
I have travelled since that May morning,
And oh, I am very wise!

There's an old, dim shop in a city
I'll be seeking before I die:
For I've got just three gold pennies—
And I know what I want to buy.

Song.

THE Wind was my mother :
The Wind is free.
Then why am I planted in one same spot
Like a tree?

A Bird was my father :
A Bird is free !
No fruit shall they gather but sighs and songs
From me.

Storm Song.

MY bosom with the beat of wings is troubled as the
day is falling;
Within my bosom hungry birds are circling on the wind
and calling.

My breast is blinded by the rain and buffeted by weary
flying.

My bosom with the beat of wings is troubled, and with
bitter crying.

Song to the Beat of Wings.

O PEACE is a white bird,
And Beauty is a castled cloud,
And Love is a fierce fire that loves to be made kind;

And I have climbed the castled cloud,
And I have caged the fierce fire,
But the white bird, the white bird—her I cannot bind!

I Love the Friendly Faces of Old Sorrows.

I LOVE the friendly faces of old Sorrows;
I have no secrets that they do not know.
They are so old, I think they have forgotten
What bitter words were spoken, long ago.

I hate the cold, stern faces of new Sorrows
Who stand and watch, and catch me all alone.
I should be braver if I could remember
How different the older ones have grown.

Prisons.

MASTERS have wrought in prisons,
At peace in cells of stone:
From their thick walls I fashion
Windows to light my own.

I Weight My Mind.

I WEIGHT my mind as best I can to keep it close to
earth
With chunky little platitudes and bits of twisted mirth;

For dust will gather in the house, and shirts unmended lie
Unless you learn to keep your mind from gadding in the
sky.

As well detain a puff of smoke, or cobweb-bind a bird!
Answering to a sudden call some inner ear has heard,

It circles up from cloud to cloud, joyous, unsatisfied,
Crying and crying after God—as minds have always
cried.

Pines in the Rain.

THIS hour that I have loved so was silver and green
and brown—

A listening hour in the pine-woods where I have learned
so much.

Soft through the tufted branches the dim rain sifted down,
Tipping with rayless jewels the low plumes I could touch.

I wish I could write a poem that was tall and straight as
a pine:

I wish it could say to someone what the pine-trees say to
me.

I think their way of talking would be no better than mine
If I were as sure and simple and quiet as a tree.

The Lord of the Trees.

I SAID, "To make it small,
One question sums them all:
If You are God and King
Unchallenged in Your place:
If You are kindness furled
In all-power: if You care
At all, how could You bear
To make a cruel world?"

I asked God to His face,
"How could You do that thing?
That answers all the rest."
God cast His eyes on me,
Then turned into a tree
And said, "Come build your nest."

The Four Kings.

I CAME upon four tall young kings
Filling the wood with smiling state,
Ringed round with dark, furred councillors,
Great servants of the great.

They drew the light from all the sky
To flood that circle of dark wood:
I think that grey day was hard-pressed
To serve their golden mood.

They did not ask me to come in,
They did not notice me, indeed,
Nor tell me what they plotted there,
Nor what fire-hearted need

Had made them turn from hickory-trees
Whom I had found in friendly talk
With the tall pines that ringed them round
On many a summer walk,

To kings of light intolerable
(Yet joyous, young, and void of wrath),
Bright gods—I slipt away and left
My shoes beside the path.

The World at the Bottom of the Lake.

THERE is a world that's floored with clouds,
And hung with tall black trees
Whose lustrous heads are weighted down
With plumèd mysteries.

That world where pines grow upside-down,
And you can see the air,
Though it is clearer than clear glass—
I have lost something there.

I hang above my lifted oar,
And look, and look, until
The water-spell has almost caught
My heart, my dreaming will.

For very much I'd like to slip
Down through the rippled floor,
And dive for something I had once
And haven't any more.

Grey.

UP among the grey clouds,
Through the grey rain,
The wild ducks are trailing
Their wavering chain.

Frailer than a lace-thread,
Through the waste of grey,
Steadily the wraith-chain
Drags my heart away.

Tree Talk.

SOME days, the pines upon my hills
Speak nothing of their secret wills,
But with an absent smile they say,
“Dear, we can’t talk to you today.”

They are like nearest friends in this
Who leave me hungry with a kiss
Sometimes: again, with two words said,
Send me rejoicing, banqueted.

I Shall Be Loved as Quiet
III.

Alternatives.

MY years have limped ; but I
Have tried so hard to fly !
And now, suppose Death brings
Gulls' wings
At last, for me to keep ?

Yet comes he not so soon
But I know what a boon
Is—Sleep.

The Highwayman.

HE nurses there among his crags
His haughty schemes—
And he may snatch my elfin purse
That's stuffed with dreams;

But I have wealth he cannot touch,
Spoiler of kings!
For I have tasted agony
And worn joy's wings.

The Marching Mountains.

THE clouds went past me after the rain—
Mountains, continents, globes—
And beauty lay on my heart with pain
Like the weight of jewelled robes.

And I was glad that I shall not lie
Forever under the grass,
Never again to watch the sky
Where the marching mountains pass.

And I was glad that I have shed
The worst of beauty's pain,
The thought that I shall soon be dead
Never to look again;

That they have no glory to declare,
That they march to no heavenly town:
The yoke of beauty is easy to bear
Since I need not lay it down.

The Window.

GOD hangs my slatted cage, sometimes,
On skyey balconies of bloom;
He lifts my latch, some rainy days,
And lets me hop about His room;

But when, at last, He thinks it time
To tell me what the Others know,
He'll lift the window toward the hills
And let me go.

To One Who Smiles at My Simplicity.

IF, as you say, O wise one,
And as I one time said,
Life cannot care for persons
And all the dead are dead,

Yet, even so, I'll salvage
Part of the desperate stake:
I shall not sleep less deeply
Because I thought to wake.

No roar of great wings passing
Above my dusty head
Shall mock me, if, you winning,
Your dead world holds me, dead.

Answers.

YOU smile at my answer—
At yours I shake my head:
You live on iron and jewels—
But I need bread.

I adore your rubies,
Admire your dynamo—
You will not taste my manna:
Yes answers more than No.

Dogmatic.

HE whom the trees accept,
He to whom the great clouds bow in passing,
He to whom the bluebirds bring the back-door gossip of
heaven—
He cannot be agnostic.
Soon or late, he must say, "I love":
Who loves, knows.

New York from the Harbor.

BEAUTY SPEAKS:

“**I**N the dark of his heart he muttered,
(Man, my greedy child,)
‘I will build me a black city
Beside the waters.
Of slate and iron will I build it,
And the fierceness of my desire.
I will build it high
(That I may outreach my brother)
With many ladders;
And men in the ships shall look upon it
To say, It is mighty and fearful.’

“And I laughed low in my heart and plotted,
I will build *me* a blue palace
Out of the waste breath of your striving,
A blue palace upon a cliff,
With many windows.
I will deck it with plummy banners;
And men in the ships shall look upon it
And say, It is beautiful!

“And when he was come up by his many ladders,
He found me waiting by my silver windows,
Me,
His mother,
Dreaming.”

The Old Woman with the Grey Shawl.

“**H**ELPA Madre Angelotti,
Geeva pennee, geeva pennee!
Geeva, and I pray for you!
For da kinda ladee,
An’ da younga fellow,
An’ da leetla girl!”

Withered Mother Angelotti,
I’ll not buy your prayers with pennies!
Grin above them in your palm—
Still they’re not the coins you think them!
One is silvered, as with tear-shine,
One is rusty-red, like heart-break,
One, I own, is light as laughter
For your ancient, battered shrewdness,
Wheedling Mother Angelotti—
Take them for your wrinkled prayers!

Prayers are things we all have need of,
Grey old Mother Angelotti—
The kind lady,
And the young fellow,
And the little girl.

Street-ends.

I LOVE the ends of streets—
Those high and narrow dreams
That slip into men's sight
For all their blinded walls;

I love the ends of streets—
Wickets for morning-gleams,
Last taverns for the light
When evening falls;

I love the ends of streets!
From those steep stairs, it seems,
Something looks back, at night,
And calls, and calls.

Sunset Song.

ASHES of roses, where the clouds were burning
A breath ago—so swiftly sink the fires.
Beauty remembered, ashen roses, yearning
Over the quiet roofs and dreaming spires.
Beauty to ashes evermore returning,
Flickering down of wildest old desires—
Ashes—the deathless Bird of Joy was burning
A breath ago, upon a thousand pyres.

Beauty for ashes! Singing with the morning,
Burns the bright rose of everlasting years;
Beauty for ashes—all our travail scorning,
Young laughter gushes from old rocky fears;
Beauty for ashes: life for life adorning,
The Future makes her jewels of our tears.

Box-car Letters.

ALONE on the hill where the sun goes down
I plunder the earth from my little town;
But the spoils I bring in my fairy sack
Are scattered and spilled on the railroad track. . . .
For there, on the siding, the box-cars doze,
And this is the way their dreaming goes:

“Sault Sainte-Marie and Chicopee,
Miami and San Antonio—”
They call like a lover’s song to me,
Call, and I want to go!
Santa Fe, Norfolk and Kalamazoo,
Sacramento, Mobile, Peru—
How, do you think, you could tamely bide
In the one small spot where your heart was tied,
When those haughty drudges came creaking through,
Tearing your anchored heart in two,
Each with a name on its stolid side
Two feet tall and ten feet wide,
That rings like a chime for you?

The wanderer’s day will have one good hour,
And every roadside one magic flower;
They wither and droop if you stay too long,
The perfume goes like an ended song.
I would come back to the ways I know,
But I would not stay when I want to go!

Wichita, Bangor, and San José,
Ypsilanti and Monterey—
They flutter my peace like the tang of spray!

From high dream-pastures homing down
To the fold of my heart in the little town,
I have to wait at the railroad track
On a trundling train with a snorting stack!
The engine's a genie, a grimy scamp
Who turns a philosopher into a tramp.
Denver, Seattle and Calumet,
Natchez, New Haven and Laramie—
Go on with your lumbering lure, and let
A poor philosopher be!

The Hill Steps.

THERE'S a flight of steps running down the hill
Toward the town that lies in the valley below,
And down you come in the paling light
While the roofs are pink with the afterglow.

And there—from the top of the steps—it lies
Like the Town of Pearl in the Prince's dream,
In every chimney a plume of blue,
In every window a blazing gleam.

Then, down you come. And, one, two, three,
Twelve steps, and your foot is on solid land—
And in less than a minute you'll catch the smell
Of onions down at the chilli-stand.

The Elopement.

THE pine-tree is a man-tree,
The proudest tree that grows!
Lifting his solemn head-plume
Up in the air he goes;

His is the staunchest column,
His is the stiffest leaf;
And when he cries, a man's voice
Groans with a strong man's grief.

The cedar-tree is a lady!
Light as a ship she goes,
Dipping her feathery rigging,
Bending to wear the snows,—

Some night they will be married—
Something will send for me—
An owl will hoot in the blue starlight,
And I'll slip out and see!

Temperate Tribute.

YOU are a poet, sycamore,
A minor poet.

You are not much good in a practical world;
You shed your ragged leaves early, and clutter up the
landscape.

But you are lovely on winter evenings
Against the afterglow—

Bare and pale and a little disdainful,
But yourself.

Maples in the Fall.

THE maple-trees are turning—
Their flames leap ever higher;
All day my heart is burning
In the rose-colored fire.

Like ashes, grey and tarnished,
My sins are sifting down:
I'll have a heart fire-burnished
To carry back to town!

The Greedy Ghost.

AND I shall walk for love of it
When I'm a ghost that's free of breath,
Not to appease a whimpering
Poor grudge at Death;

But just to see this shining sphere
Where all my years are pinpoint-tied—
A fly upon a peach could crawl
To the other side!

The minarets of cloud can wait
For one star-twinkle; wait until
I shall have gazed on Mother Rome
From every hill,

And kissed a hand to Greece, and crossed
A palm-tree's shadow in Algiers—
And knelt on stones where my great Dead
Have spilled their tears.

Rain and Wind.

I LOVE the Rain,
But she is a sad lady—
She weeps and weeps.
She is silvery and beautiful,
But I do not need her;
I can find the likes of her, any day, in my heart.

But oh, it is the Wind I love,
The wooer with laughter,
He is my true lover!
He snatches away the silvery veil of the sad lady,
He changes her into a huntress who races with him on
the mountains,
He turns the raindrops in her hair into cold jewels,
And her tears to little birds.

It is the Wind I love,
The laughing, racing, starry Wind from the outer spaces,
He is my true lover!

Color.

WE belong to the blue serge world,
Even in our village.

We have outgrown color as a child outgrows its toys,
Regretfully.

Even our laughing yellow girls,
Who whiten their smooth cheeks,
And straighten their black hair,
Love red like a secret sin;
And nearly all of us have learned to smile
At the green hatbands of José and 'Ilario
Who come to town for whiskey, Saturdays.
We are very sober.

But Beauty outwits us;
For when the Council lays new sewer-pipes,
And tired, blind workmen hang red lanterns out
At sundown,
I, for one,
Quite drunken-eyed stroll up the dusk-blue street
Strewn with Aladdin's rubies. . . .

Mountain-dream.

I SEE. . . .

(Having once seen the unforgettable)

I see chasms swimming in mountain-light,

Rocks, red and white, columns and domes and arches;

Golden-buff shoulders of near peaks,

White dazzle of far ones . . .

Sheets of purple foam upon seas of blowing green;

Fluttering, glistening cotton-woods edging the pebbly glitter of arroyos;

Hay-stacks—golden bubbles upon high, still seas of bright stubble;

Little cedars scrambling upon the boulders to plant their ragged, windy banners;

The blue, blue, incredible blue of mountain-waters . . .

God's dream spread out above me,

His playthings strewn at my feet. . . .

And here I stay under fatherly trees who indulgently tell me

They are near to the sky as any,

And tag after drawling red roads that smile at my high-flown fancies,

As they saunter along with their hands in their pockets,

Thinking that, maybe, day after tomorrow,

They will take a look at the crops from the top of the next little hill.

A Flock of Birds.

I—A BLUEBIRD

NOBODY has ever told how a bluebird sings.
It is like a butterfly whispering secrets to a pear-blossom;
It is like the elf-high blades in the oat-field telling each other how it feels to be up;
It is like the voice of a brook where it steps over a stone;
It is like a happy thought talking;
It is like the taste of spring-water;
It is like the brown glee of the ploughed ground.
Nobody has ever been able to tell how a bluebird sings,
And neither am I.

II—DOVES

CHILDREN like doves because of their sickle-wings,
With whistles under them.
Men like them for their gentle, still, grey manners—
They are never ruffled, like women.
Old people like doves because of their haunted voices:
They understand what they mean.
God likes doves because they are doves:
They mourn softly.

III—THE WREN

THE wren's mind is in her tail,
But it is a charming tail,
And a brisk and whirring mind.

Once I caught a wren standing on tiptoe, peeking into my
room.

I should have been shocked at such conduct in a thrush,
But I didn't mind it in a wren.

IV—THE WOOD-THRUSH, OR BELL-BIRD

THE thrush knows a secret.

He knows why we came here,
And why we shouldn't mind dying.

He knows how the earth would look if you saw it from a
star.

In winter he goes to heaven.

And yet, every spring,

He is just as pleased to see the first bluet,

And he takes just as good care of his children,

As if he didn't know anything else;

And I think cut-worms taste just as good to him

As they do to the wicked jay.

V—THE JAY

FOR the jay, you know, goes to the other place
Every Friday.

There he eats little singers in their speckled eggs,

And fireflies with their lights on,

And slim, green, boneless little lizards,

All day long,

Raw.

I can fancy their innocent tails sticking out of his mouth

When he swaggers up to my respectable food-shelf,

And helps himself contemptuously,

To show me that the vaunted crumbs of virtue
Are a mere appetizer to the bold and bad.
I don't argue with him:
I just love the good birds best.

VI—THE CARDINAL AND HIS LADY

THE redbird is the core of fire at the heart of my still
living;
And his little lady is the soft ashes covering the half-seen
embers.

Cocoons.

I

SCORN is a scourge:
I need the scourge for myself.
Love is a key:
Except it open the one low door,
I must stay in my cell with my scourge.

II

I HAVE fought for my triumph
Bitterly and long,
And I would have fought to the death
For my soul's sake and yours.

But now that it is won—
See, here is my sword:
Take it away—I do not like to look at it.

Let us play you are the conqueror.

III

OUT into a green backyard came a woman in a blue
apron
Carrying yellow meal in a bright tin pail.
The chickens came running;
And those little hungry sparrows that are my thoughts,
All day teasing and quarrelling,
Settled down on the grass among the plump flock,
Greedy and pleased.

IV

I NEVER knew a farmer who scolded the bluebirds
For thinking the fence-posts were made for them:
And I guess God will not be offended
If my heart builds its nest in His fence-post.

Garrets for Poets.

I FOUND a royal moth half-way out of his chrysalis,
Powerless to go further.
I broke the hard, brittle shell with my fingers—too late.
His crumpled wings were gorgeous,
But they would not fly.

The limitations of a chrysalis are the strength of a caterpillar;
They help him to concentrate his mind on wings.
But when it comes to emerging,
Every caterpillar should arrange to be prompt and lucky—
If he wants to soar.

Dressmaker.

“**Y**ES, plain things do last longer—
Straight lines always look stylish, somehow.”
She knelt at my feet, hanging a skirt,
Her mouth full of pins.
Her tired face caught a faint light
As she groped for the More behind her words:
A Thought had touched her soul;
She was a timid, rustic priestess
Of Art.

And I, who had gone in drooping,
Came out with a high head:
“Aha!” I said to the housetops,
“Plain things do last longer—
Straight lines will always be stylish as trees.”

Tools.

WE found ready to our hands in the beginning
A trowel and a knife:

I have kept them both.

You throw away the knife, and call the throwing,
Courage;

I flinch, but I use it,

And call the using, Choice.

I think I was given so terrible a tool

Because it was needed.

One can tell the difference by looking at our gardens.

God knows which is the better:

For the passer-by I suppose it's a matter of taste.

No Respecter of Persons.

WHY, God may even go to church
And listen to the hymns and prayers,
Just as he walks among the corn
And breathes its homely, incensed airs;

And those adventurers of God's—
His ragged, bitter, rebel clan—
Forget He sometimes walks beside
A comfortable righteous man.

Full Moon before Dark.

DELICATE as a flower of silk,
A blown balloon of luminous shadow,
The moon, a pale-gold bubble,
Floats just above the trees.

If it were my bubble, the Methodist steeple would prick it.
But nothing can prick God's bubble—
Not even a church-spire.

The Lord Speaks from the Banks of the Stream.

GOD said to the Puritan
As He stood on the bank of His river,
"I told you to swim to me:
You builded a bridge of stone
To bring back the Soul to the Giver.
Your timorous, dry-shod plan
Was well enough in its way,
But you wrestled and toiled alone,
And your work was heavier far,
And now you will have to stay
On the bank till you learn to play—
Old and stiff as you are."

God said to the drowning Sinner,
"I told you to swim to me.
But you played and played in the stream,
And you stayed and stayed in the stream,
And you laughed at the ones who said
You might stay in the water too long.
And now you are cramped and cold,
And you will go down in the stream.
And then, fished out of the slime,
I must leave you to air and dry,
Wasting eternal time,
Hung on a thorn, to sigh
While measureless years go by."

God called to the Swimmer-with-Glee,
God called to the Laden-and-Weary,

“Swim to me, swim to me!
Bring back the Gift to the Giver!
Dear,
I am a shady Tree
For those who rest from the River.”

Three Small Poems.

TO GET WISDOM

I WILL spread out my mind
As the wind spreads the skies:
I will make my heart Argus,
Full of love's eyes:
So shall I grow
Abysmally wise.

MEEKNESS AND PRIDE

ME EKNESS and Pride
Are fruits of one tree:
Eat of them both
For mastery:
Take one of Pride—
Of the other, three.

COURAGE

COURAGE is armor
A blind man wears;
The calloused scar
Of outlived despairs:
Courage is Fear
That has said its prayers.

Not in the Whirlwind.

DO I speak soft and little,
Do I offer you a drop of honey in a bent brown
leaf?

Yet I, too, have been rent by the whirlwind;
I have lain trembling under its bellowings,
I have endured its fangs,
I have heard it hiss and groan, "Bitterness, bitterness!"
But all I have left,
After its searchings and its rendings,
May be told in a soft voice
And is sweet—
Sweet,
Like a drop of thick honey in a bent brown leaf.

Vanity.

I KNOW why ladies dress themselves
In silky sheens and peacock dyes:
They hush their hungry little souls
And feed them through their snatching eyes.

I know why ladies mince and strut
And wrap themselves in mimic state:
Despairing prisoners of the world,
Their hearts are hungry to be great.

Songs from a Still Place.

I—THE WALL OF TEARS

PAIN is a house of glass
High on a stony hill;
Over it pours the rain,
Spraying from roof and sill.

It is filled with a curious light,
And the Soul says, peering out,
"Were it not for my wall of tears,
I could see what God is about!"

II—THE PLAITED WREATH

I'VE made my days into a wreath,
Since I've no other crown,
And no one sees, or calls me proud
As I go up and down.

For it is woven of three strands
To wear through rain and sun:
One, agony; one, ecstasy—
And hidden peace is one.

III—BEADS

HOW I have scrambled for my beads!
And oh, what anxious care
To pick them up, and sort them out,
And braid them in my hair!

Rubies, and beads of amethyst,
Gold like a baby's curl,
And heavy beads of ebony,
And pale ones, of dead pearl.

Why did I take so long to learn
(And how my fingers bled!)
This simple way of stringing them
Upon a silver thread?

IV—PEACE

HIDE a seed under a rock,
Water the rock with tears:
So may you pick the flower
After a hundred years.

Fall on the sword of God—
See that it pierce you through:
Out of that wet, red stalk
The flower will blossom, too.

V—GIVING

ISAT upon a stone alone,
Hungry, and cold, and dumb;
God's ravens had forgotten me,
My wallet held no crumb.

Then one came toiling up the rocks
Seeking my bruited store:
I spread a banquet for us both—
There was enough and more!

VI—FREE

UP on God's window-sill,
Carolling high and shrill,
Shaken with ecstasy,
There clung my spirit—free!

God showed His glorious Head—
Singing, to Him she said,
“Who was it did me wrong?
Why was I caged so long,
Tangled in wires and strings,
Under the stars?”

“Birdling, I made the wings—
You made the bars.”

Orders.

SHE is wise, the Ancient Mother,
Her ways are not our ways:
We cannot circumscribe her
Though we watch her all our days.

On each of her questioning children
She presses a different will:
To one she says, "Keep busy!"
To one she says, "Keep still!"

She said to me, "Wait and listen:
I have plenty to drive and do—
But, once in a while, when you are *sure*,
Speak out a word or two!"

One Morning in Gyara.

Says Epictetus, "And where wilt Thou have me to be? At Rome or Athens? Only remember me there!" And again, "If you are in Gyara . . . be intent on this: how he that lives in Gyara may live in Gyara like a man of spirit."

Gyara was an island in the Aegean, used as a place of banishment.

ONE morning in Gyara
My Soul shook me awake:
"Then will you fight no battle,
Do nothing for *my* sake?"

"My plumes are dull with drooping
In the same maple's shade:
The very air is furrowed
With paths my wings have made."

That morning in Gyara
She turned her sullen head
And Socrates and Jesus
Were standing by our bed.

Under the new-leaved maples
Lord Buddha paced in brown,
And by his side the wise Slave
Went limping up and down.

My Soul bent like a sapling
Caught in a sudden gust:
With wings her shamed face veiling
She bowed her in the dust;

For thronging house and dooryard
Of us who ill deserve,
Were guests she had invited
And then forgot to serve!

Rainbows of far-caught wonder
From all their garments rayed:
Round them the dooryard maples
Rippled like seas of jade.

Uprisen in Gyara,
Barefoot, rapt and whole,
She went about among them,
Bearing her plate and bowl;

For they had come from farther
Than Athens is, or Rome,
That morning, to Gyara,
To find my Soul at home.

The Cripple.

A BIRD came hopping on my shelf
With one good foot—a stump the other :
It hurt my heart to see so maimed
A feathered brother.

Yet when he spread his wings to go
He seemed to launch himself with laughter,
As though to shame my sorry thoughts
That fluttered after ;

For though he could not perch so well,
Nor strut, nor swagger any longer,
His wings were strong as any bird's—
Or were they stronger ?

Pronouns.



THE Lord said,
"Say, 'We' ";
But I shook my head,
Hid my hands tight behind my back, and said,
Stubbornly,
"I."

The Lord said,
"Say, 'We' ";
But I looked upon them, grimy and all awry.
Myself in all those twisted shapes? Ah, no!
Distastefully I turned my head away,
Persisting,
"They."

The Lord said,
"Say, 'We' ";
And I,
At last,
Richer by a hoard
Of years
And tears,
Looked in their eyes and found the heavy word
That bent my neck and bowed my head:
Like a shamed schoolboy then I mumbled low,
"We,
Lord."

Root and Flower.

PAIN is the rich, dark loam
Where my roots thrust and grope,
Breaking their stubborn foot,
Fighting for scope;

But up in the delicate air
That wraps leaf and bark,
Joy, like a foam of flowers,
Bursts from the dark.

Initiation.

NOW God has given me
The sureness of a tree:
My heart flows out of my breast
Into a tree, for rest.

Still must I fall like water
Shattered in spray;
Still must I go as the wind goes
Feeling her way;
Still, as a fire eat upward
Through smothering pain;
Still break and yield as a flower breaks
In beating rain:

But when I must have rest
My heart flows out of my breast,
Slips out of herself, is free.
At last God gives to me
The wisdom of a tree.

Winter Dusk.

THE black pines, and the pale-gold moon,
And the cold blue sky,
And the drumming whir of small hid wings
In the bush close by;

And the sober rose in the leaden sheen
Of the sedgy lake—
This beauty feeds and heals my heart
It used to break.

This joy that was a restless pang,
Pain-edged, sword-bright,
Now wraps me in stern tenderness,
Secure delight.

I have come home to the heart of things,
Made friends with pain,
And God has given me sevenfold
My joy again.

Acknowledgment.

EVERY evening now, for years,
As I have gained the top of the hill,
Three cedars have signalled me from across the valley.

I owe them a poem.

Companionable green angels,
Ambassadors of loveliness,
Princes in willing exile,
Telling familiarly of the burning aloofness of beauty
To all who will stop to hear—
I kneel at your feet!
Steadfast ardors,
Too wise for importunity,
Noble and negligent—
Touch me with the edges of your ragged mantles;
Give me of your way-worn, windy grace;
Shed from your homely, aromatic wings upon me
Healing and potency:
Accept my salute.

Anniversary in November.

I—BIRTHDAY

THIS is her day. For, years ago,
On such a bannered day as this—
Dogwood and sumach flaming so—
She died. I cannot go and kiss

Her forehead, as on birthdays gone;
She is a birth ahead of me.
Meantime, she knows I keep this one—
This door of Time where she went free.

I, clinging to the windy sill,
She, stooping from the wingèd air,
Meet on this ledge of love's high will—
Her birthday, that she lets me share.

II—THE LIGHT IN THE WOODS

YOUR day has come again. Far overhead,
Cross-stitched in wavering lines against the sky,
Or gleaming buff and silver, wild and high,
The geese slip by like phantoms, phantom-led.
The air is blue as incense-smoke; flame-red
The little maples, idly dreaming by,
Trail their lit lanterns in the lake—and I
Dream of your life among the living Dead.

Through the cathedral-windows of the year
Once more the still November sunlight streams,

And all my World—so low and dim and dear!—
Turns like a maple-leaf to catch the gleams
That tremble down from Yours—it hangs so near,
Clearer than waking, richer than old dreams.

III—MIGRANTS

THE wild, great birds, like disembodied Souls,
Haughty with freedom, will not stoop to me,
For all my yearning; but the little ones
Flash for my joy through every bush and tree.

I wonder if the strong-winged spirits go
Swiftly, like that, beyond our farthest scope,
While smaller ones and gentler, stop and stir
The trees about us with their love and hope?

IV—ALL SAINTS' DAY

THIS is my All Saints' Day. I think you come,
Parting the brodered curtains of the year,
And say to Those whom you have brought from Home,
Softly, "Hush, look! She knows that we are here."

The woods are lovely as your world must be,
Kindled by delicate, breath-shaken pyres
To haunted light; angelic drapery
Floats in the smoke above the maple-fires.

The air is tranced with beauty; beauty rained
Just now, although the black-gum hardly stirred;
My plain, white hours are shaken, beauty-stained:
I wait and listen,—and I hear your Word.

Clear Hour.

I HAVE been the wasted spray, the flying, fretted foam:
Now I'll be the blue pool where water is at home.

I have been the haggard cloud, wind-driven like white
dust:

Now I'll be the smooth sky the littlest star may trust.

And I have been a free bird, to follow my own needs:
Now in the cage of God's love, the stars are golden seeds.

The Housewife: Winter Afternoon.

THE children's cat upon the window-sill,
The little sounds that make the house so still,

That old brown hunting-hat upon the rack,
I give away, and John keeps getting back,

The jonquil blooming in the yellow bowl—
I well believe that each one has a soul,

Each, body to some delicate, rich dream,
As my blue tea-pot to its perfumed steam.

"The shadows of the angels' houses"—so
Said William Blake of houses here below,

And if, at last, they'd set upon my grave,
(As once they furnished forth the red-skinned brave,)

My old blue tea-pot, and a bowl like this,
I think I'd sooner take root in new bliss,

And not come dreaming back, a happy fool,
To wait, like this, till Johnny comes from school.

Sky-colors.

I—BLUE AND SILVER

THE clouds are flying, white horse-tails,
The fierce little moon is a silver gadfly,
The wind is a whistling silver whip:
Gallop, gallop, wild white stallions,
Whinnying silverly,
Across the cold blue valleys,
Over the crystal hills!

II—ROSE AND GREY

FIERY roses hang from the grey cloud-bushes,
Loosely, ready to shatter—
Great flame-roses above the cold earth.
I hold my breath lest the sharp black branches of the old
oak
Catch them and tear them,
Shake and scatter their ragged petals,
And shorten by a heart-beat
Their unseasonable blooming.

III—PALE PINK AND PRIMROSE

ON a knoll in the old fallow field,
Dressed in the tawny-grey of dead grasses,
Three little pines in short skirts stand together,
Like little girls in party-dresses;
While, to make them clap their hands,
The clouds beyond them prink and pencil themselves with
delicate fairy tints,
Such as little girls love.

IV—CLEAR GOLD

THE hem of the grey Dusk is of ember-red velvet;
The bare trees brush against it like thin black
feathers;

The windows of the houses are square pendants of topaz
Muffled in veils of blue;

And high above this blending of dim splendors—

A flower for Her hair—

The bright bent moon sprays a delicate, raying light,
Like the heart of a water-lily, clear gold.

Soft Rain.

THERE is room for ladies in a world that holds soft
rain,

For delicate, undefended beauty
And gentleness.

There is room for slender young things, virgin-wistful,
With minds like bridal veils;

There is room for brittle old-lady minds
That function like the tinkling of tea-cups.

We have been too long blurry with rain,
They say,

And they are doubtless right:

It is the hour for biting wind and stabbing sunshine.

But I have walked in the soft rain today;

I have seen the mist

Sifting through the black mantilla of the bare elm;

There was in it eternal beauty—

It wrapped my heart in peace.

And it was shown unto me

That there will always be room for ladies—a little
room—

In a world that wearies, sometimes,

Of its hausfrau harvest-zeal for corn and squashes,

Of the feminist fury of its Wind-Valkyries;

That lapses, even,

From its male salt and sleet and thunder

Into moods of rain,

Soft rain,

And mist.

The Mirrored Bird.

THE bird that flies under the water—
O lustrous breast and wing!—
The bird that skims under the water,
I wonder, does it sing?

The bird that slips under the ripple—
O gleaming wing and breast!—
The flitter under the ripple,
I wonder, does it nest?

If I could find one nesting,
If I could hear one sing,
In the thickets under the ripple
That spreads in a silver ring,

I might surprise the secret,
The music never heard—
Trilling under the water
In the throat of the mirrored bird.

If My Breath Is Taken.

IF there be another world
Lovelier than this,
I hope that I'll know better
What to do with bliss,

For now I stand here dripping
Like an April tree,
With rivulets of beauty
Trickling off from me!

Now the full moon riding high
Drenches me with gold,
Heaps my greedy senses
With more than they can hold:

If my breath is taken
By this beauty, even—
How shall my naked spirit breast
The crystal floods of heaven?

Labels.

I THINK I'll be going—
A creature that sings
Can't wait for the labels
To stick to her wings!

If it's worth your while, catch me—
(At least, if you're able:
Aristides himself
Was no match for a label).

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